

THE
MIDWAY REVIEW

Volume 11, Issue 2 — Winter 2016

“Now you’re acting like a CEO!”

*Google Maps suggested driving would take a cool fifty-eight hours. So
instead I flew.*

Their reputations impact their bottom lines.

A survey of the past 10 years.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

This is the tenth anniversary of *The Midway Review*. Are we running out of *Punch* cartoons to pilfer? Art to taxonomize? TV shows to philosophize about? Childhoods to reflect on? Fortunately, no—these things seem to come in infinite variety. When this journal was founded, it defined itself as “nonpartisan,” meaning it was supposed to be a collaboration between liberal and conservative students on campus for the sake of joint inquiry and debate. Over the next ten years, the typical piece changed in style and content: for instance, fewer op-eds on U.S. politics, more personal essays. But the emphasis on long-form critical non-fiction has remained. Nowadays, rather than being “a journal of politics and culture,” we’re simply “a journal of essays.” Journalist and writer Ta-Nehisi Coates recently mused about the etymology of that word on Twitter—“Love the french on this. ‘Essayer’ meaning ‘to try.’” In this issue, you’ll find many thoughtful attempts: to cache out the values of a museum, to unpack a journey, to probe a new framework for human rights. We’ve also taken this opportunity to include several excerpts from pieces in our archives, to show how our focus has shifted over time.

Here’s to a strong start.

—The Editors

A Trip to the MSI

Christian Belanger

“To youth, confused by twisted ideologies, we let the thundering facts of American industrial history speak.”

—Lenox R. Lohr, President of the Museum of Science and Industry (1940-1968)

“I’ve seen aquariums and planetariums and that dreadful Museum of Science and Industry, which is like a paean to General Motors. Quite ghastly in its corrupt values—including its splendiferous Muppet presentation, where you pay \$1.50 to get in, see fifteen stuffed Muppets in a glass case, and then that leads to a shop where you can buy merchandise! I mean, it was a fucking disgrace.”

—David Bowie, 1980

According to the website of the Museum of Science and Industry (MSI), about 344,000 schoolchildren visited in 2014; if we assume that most of Chicago’s schools are in session for 180 days a year, a rough calculation reveals that about 2,000 students pass through the museum every day. This means that on any given weekday of the school year, adults who choose to enter the Museum of Science and Industry will find themselves severely in the minority, outnumbered by the hordes of elementary and middle school students running, yelling, sneezing, and sometimes sobbing their way around the museum’s exhibits. And while some kids move aimlessly between exhibits, most rush around, eager to explore the interactive attractions designed to capture and hold their attention, like a

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game run by a pedagogical, holographic Derrick Rose that teaches projectile velocities and angles, or Mindball, a two-person contest in which the person whose brain activity is more relaxed wins.

The MSI is largely organized around the idea that it is an appealing destination for schools and parents looking to amuse and educate their children. A picture book of the museum released in 1950, titled simply *The Museum of Science and Industry*, reads, “In accomplishing its job as an educational center, this institution has changed the whole connotation of the word ‘museum’ from the dead to the quick, so to speak.” If that was true sixty-six years ago, it is even more true now: it’s undeniable that the MSI is deeply and dynamically entertaining. The museum’s first stewards understood that, while one might visit the Art Institute out of a dreary sense of civic duty, or take visiting relatives to the Field Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry had to have a certain degree of pep.

But since its beginning, the MSI has also been, as its name obviously suggests, an institution bound up with and dependent on American industry, a place where companies pay to put on certain exhibits, often about themselves. It is also a museum that unreservedly taps into the popular enthusiasm and unfettered optimism that mark so much of public discourse about science and technology in the 21st century. Both of these elements play into the ways the MSI educates the schoolchildren that flock there, and the resulting mixture of museum, advertisement, and manufactured enthusiasm is what continues to mark it out as a place of delightful, terrifying fun.

The Museum of Science and Industry received its first visitors in June 1933, a couple of weeks after the opening of the Century of Progress International Exposition. That was the second World’s Fair held in Chicago, but the MSI building itself dates back to the first World’s Fair—the famous 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition that journalist Richard Harding Davis described as “the greatest event in the history of the country since the Civil War.” At that time, it housed the Palace of Fine Arts, one of the few parts of the Fair dedicated to showcasing painting and sculpture—distinct in this way from the technological prowess put on display almost everywhere else. It was

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also the only building whose exhibits were so expensive that it was built with brick to prevent its destruction by fire, a problem that plagued the wood and plaster structures that made up the rest of the Exposition. As a result, the Palace remained after the rest of the Fair burned down or was dismantled.

For a couple of decades, the building would house the Columbian Museum of Chicago (now known as the Field Museum). When the Field moved north in 1920, though, the building stood vacant for some years, until Julius Rosenwald, the famous philanthropist and part-owner of Sears, Roebuck and Co., came back from a 1911 trip to Europe. There, Rosenwald had visited the Deutsches Museum in Munich, then and now the world's largest exhibitor of science and technology.

In *A Continuous Marvel*, Chicago journalist and historian Herman Kogan describes the effect of the visit on Rosenwald's son:

There, his eight-year-old son, William, had discovered and been fascinated by trips to a unique museum....By pushing buttons or working levers or dropping a coin in a slot, William could generate static electricity, see pistons traveling back and forth in engines whose cylinders had been cut open, light up an X-ray machine so that the bones in his hand were strikingly revealed when held up against a fluorescent screen, and look at the wheels of a jacked-up steam locomotive spin around.¹

Rosenwald decided that he wanted to build something akin to the Deutsches Museum in America. Initially, he was skeptical

The men whereof were of a Grass-Green complexion.



1. Herman Kogan, *A Continuing Marvel: The Story of the Museum of Science and Industry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1973), 11.

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of the Palace of Fine Arts building, declaring that he preferred a building more “practical in type rather than monumental.”² He was soon persuaded otherwise, however, and in 1926 the newly formed executive committee of the Museum of Science and Industry acquired the Palace.

From its beginnings, the MSI drew deeply on its European counterparts for inspiration on how to present its exhibits. The museum’s first two annual reports, spanning the three years between 1928 and 1930, give the extensive transatlantic itinerary of Waldemar Kaempffert, the museum’s first director, in which he studied technical museums in cities like Dusseldorf, Budapest, and Antwerp, as well as the inimitable Deutsches. And Kaempffert felt as fiercely as Rosenwald that the job of the MSI would be to inculcate the same whirring, spinning sense of marvel that young William had experienced at the famous Munich museum. After a banquet in honor of his appointment, he told reporters, “There will be no collection of mechanized fossils. You will feel yourself part of a great evolving industrial organism. We are going to have activity! Buttons to push! Levers and handles to turn! And nowhere any sign reading ‘Hands Off!’” It should be noted, for any aspiring visitors, that such signs do exist now, most notably and disappointingly in the bicycle exhibit.

But after its opening, the MSI sputtered along quite feebly at a financial loss; by 1938, its deficit was \$353,000, and it had no regular way to raise revenue, especially since it didn’t charge for admission. The museum’s trustees, increasingly desperate, enlisted Lenox Lohr, a former engineer and then the President of NBC. The strategy for turning around the MSI that Lohr adopted upon assuming his office in 1940 would define the museum’s path up to the present day, and Lohr himself summed it up best when he told some of his staff members, “Very large sums of additional money must be obtained, and the only place I see to get them is from industry.”³

Over the next decade, Lohr would oversee the installation of a number of exhibits sponsored by various corporations: the Santa Fe Railway model train exhibit, running 3,000 square feet across a miniature America, a Standard Oil display “tracing the exploration

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for and uses of petroleum,” and the General Motors *Motorama* that David Bowie disliked so much. He coupled this profitable tactic with a deep commitment to the “mass education” of MSI visitors about the wonders and possibilities of American industry—it was under Lohr, and with the support of the superintendent of Chicago’s schools, that groups of children from elementary and middle schools across Chicagoland first began thronging to the museum, over 100,000 of them annually by the late ‘40s.

The renaissance was undertaken with a grave air of ideological responsibility, as evidenced by this *de facto* mission statement from the 1950 picture book, which stands as a sort of introductory chapter to the Cold War:

American industry, aided by scientific research, has constantly placed within the consumer's reach a better way of living, has helped to give the world the fullest life in recorded history. A responsibility exists to tell that story. It must be told to clarify past misunderstandings, to prevent further misunderstandings, which, if allowed to grow, might undermine that combination of science and industry functioning under the aegis of a democracy. It is this responsibility which the Museum of Science and Industry is sharing with industry, with science, with America.⁴

The gravitas is funny, but more remarkable is the clear-eyed, keen-hearted patriotism with which Lohr and his staff approached their jobs. Kogan writes that, during his earlier tenure, Kaempffert wanted to include some information on the dangers of congestion and urban pollution as part of an exhibit on skyscrapers and city planning. The Board of Trustees turned him down, reasoning that it was not their place to opine on something best left to politicians. But the MSI had no problem extolling the virtues of industry or, even better, allowing industries to extol their own virtues.

And Lohr’s model was wildly successful. In the first year of his reign, attendance increased by about 40,000. In his second, it increased by 400,000. Gradually, the deficit was reined in; by the end of World War II, the MSI was operating at a steady profit. In part,

4. Chicago Commercial Club, Committee on the MSI, “The Museum Goes to War,” (Chicago: Chicago Commercial Club, 1943) 9-10.

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this was due to the diversification of its stock holdings to the same companies, like General Motors and Dow Chemicals, that had paid for exhibits at the MSI—a mutually beneficial arrangement.

In my several recent trips to the museum, it's clear that many parts of the MSI still straddle the strange line between exhibit and advertisement. The model railway continues to run, though it has added a couple of sponsors—rail cars emblazoned with the wonderfully generic (but very real) Hub International Group logo; Maersk model shipping crates moved back and forth by orange cranes—and the John Deere tractors and combines fill up the exhibit floor next to an idyllic Midwestern home dedicated to the wonders of all the soy-filled food products you unwittingly consume. A small naval exhibit tucked away in a corner near the famous U-Boat is sponsored in part by Donald Rumsfeld. There are also attempts to capitalize on the more intangible advances of the burgeoning tech sector; an IBM-sponsored exhibit is devoted to the ideas and possibilities associated with data analysis.

But I also saw some exhibits that were distinctly modern in character. It's perhaps most evident at the Toymaker 3000—a name plucked out of a Roald Dahl book, without any of Dahl's winking slyness—which is sponsored by Junior Achievement, an organization devoted to teaching young children how to become budding entrepreneurs. The exhibit is housed in a pair of rooms decorated with the color scheme and subtlety of a traffic light: vomituous greens next to screaming reds (and kids). The ostensible purpose of the place is to show children how to run Ball Enterprises (whose actual existence I'm still unsure of),



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a company manufacturing juggling balls and other circus supplies; its real goal appears to be something like a zany indoctrination into the tenets of capitalism. Each child is given their own toy to take with them through the exhibit, and a series of arcade-like games test their business acumen.

One game I played—ominously titled “Don’t Drop the Ball!”—began by informing me that my company was on the verge of experiencing a hostile takeover. What would I do? My options were given to me by three nightmarish cartoon heads, each apparently voiced by a similarly dysfunctional piece of text-to-speech software. Economic illiterate that I am, I panicked and picked the wrong answer, of course—you have to account for tangible and intangible assets when evaluating the worth of your company (I had only thought only the former mattered).

I got the next two questions right, though. “Now you’re acting like a CEO!” the weedy-looking animation on the screen praised me. (I can only assume the poor, sycophantic drip was my accountant.) Meanwhile, behind me, some children were ascending the corporate ladder, this time in the form of a rock climbing wall, hauling themselves up by handles exhorting them to “buy equity” and “ensure the stockholders make a profit.”

Vaguely uneasy, I wandered into the next room, where I was confronted by the pictures and paraphernalia of great past captains of industry, from Kroc to Penney, Bean to Boeing, each lauded for his (or, occasionally, her) daring vision and risk-taking abilities. These imposing examples of great entrepreneurship are in line with Lohr’s vision of a museum designed to create a sense of reverence among its young visitors. It’s a sort of celebration of individual brilliance that is, quite literally, a frequent sight across the museum: famous names—Lamarck, Morse, Darwin, Foucault (the physicist and not the philosopher, as my editor kindly pointed out to me)—are carved into the walls of the main hall, just below the ceilings.

Sometimes, though, the celebration seems slightly premature. Take, for instance, the presence of Aubrey De Grey in the Fast

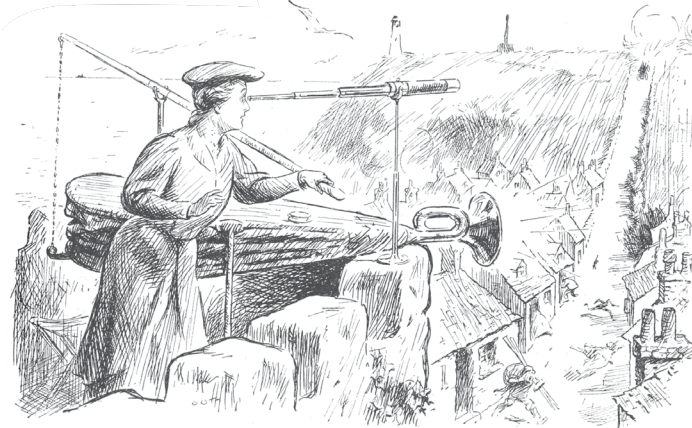
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Forward exhibit, dedicated to posing such incisive questions about the future as, “What if your pizza could be delivered via email?” De Grey is a biogerontologist, which means he studies the science of aging. He is, to say the least, a divisive figure: an editorial in MIT’s *Technology Review* once labeled him “a troll,” and critics allege that his anti-aging proposals are overly sensationalistic and deeply flawed. But the MSI exhibit does little to teach the controversy surrounding De Grey, instead presenting his seven types of aging damage as undisputed fact under the tantalizing question, “What if you could live to be 200 years old?”

It’s this sort of ethical carelessness that’s echoed later on in the exhibit in the case of Peter Diamandis, the creator of the Ansari X Prize that awarded \$10 million to the first non-governmental company to send humans into space twice in a fortnight. But apart from a recounting of his achievements—or, as is befitting Diamandis’ brand of utopianism, his perpetual near-achievements—there is also “Peter’s Laws, a Sociopathic Obsessive Compulsive Creed,” featuring such highlights as: “When given a choice...take both!”; “When forced to compromise ask for more”; and the common-sense but slightly puzzling addition of “The ratio of something to nothing is infinite.” (One pictures Diamandis reciting the last one as a sort of mantra to himself in the mirror each morning.) If you swing by, you may also notice that those celebrated are almost overwhelmingly male. In the Fast Forward exhibit, there is one woman among the ten people featured: Ayanna Howard, a professor and NASA scientist.

But the experience of an exhibit like Fast Forward is a far cry from the remaining vestiges of the old MSI. The model railroad and the John Deere displays tie industry to the quotidian: American ingenuity has put these unthinkable wonders at your everyday service and given you the highest standard of living in the world—admire them. Meanwhile, there’s also Science Storms, unveiled in 2010. Science Storms is dedicated to explaining the science behind natural phenomena like tornados, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Of course, I’m not sure if I saw anybody stop to read the explanations next to each display; instead, visitors flock to the simulated tornado vortex and live lightning coil. The entire room is cast in a sort of

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The Empress
desired to know
what Stars there
were besides.

hyperborean light, the dark blue tint of an action movie laboratory. Quotes about the vague wonders of science are inscribed on the walls from the likes of Carl Sagan and Richard Dawkins, perhaps best-known at this point for his crypto-philosophical, deeply orthodox atheism.

In exhibits like these, the MSI seems to borrow more than simply a quote from Dawkins. In a paper on Dawkins and the other members of the New Atheist movement, philosopher Massimo Pigliucci defines their particular brand of “scientism”: “a totalizing attitude that regards science as the ultimate standard and arbiter of all interesting questions; or alternatively that seeks to expand the very definition and scope of science to encompass all aspects of human knowledge and understanding.”⁵

5. Massimo Pigliucci, “New Atheism and the Scientific Turn in the Atheism Movement,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 37 (2013), 144.

The sort of view Pigliucci describes is frequently, in my experience, accompanied by a corresponding attitude of deep enthusiasm for scientific achievement. Science becomes a sort of panacea, idealized on Facebook pages like “I Fucking Love Science” or in the fandom of charismatic figures like Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Bill Nye. And exhibits like Science Storms and Fast Forward are another node on this network, helping to spread the idea that science is inherently and always something ideally good, helping to improve the world around us.

That is not to refute the obvious, that science can and does

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continually improve the world around us. And one might think that the job of the MSI is exactly to leave its visitors with a fresh sense of the possibilities of scientific achievement, especially in a country whose rhetoric on the issue is sometimes frighteningly backwards. But one can believe both of these things, that science is good, and that more people, especially young ones, need to hear that, while also believing that a museum like the MSI has a duty to educate its visitors about the problems that have inevitably followed along with the progress of science.

It is not simply in its atypical dynamism, then, that the MSI is not a museum: it also lacks the appearance of impartiality that most museums possess. And as fascinating as an exhibit like the *Toymaker 3000* can be, it's a little bit worrying that thousands of children pass through it every week, essentially forced to listen to the unopposed voice of a certain ideology.

As the epigraph from Lohr at the beginning of this essay shows, the MSI was founded on the belief that there was a need to educate children about the benefits of capitalism, specifically American industrial capitalism. The basis for that belief is obvious; can there be any doubt which "twisted ideologies" Lohr was referring to? Its method was straightforward, too: leave a stark impression on the hearts and minds of its visitors. Whether or not you think all of this is a good thing depends on the beliefs you subscribe to, but at least it had a clear task.

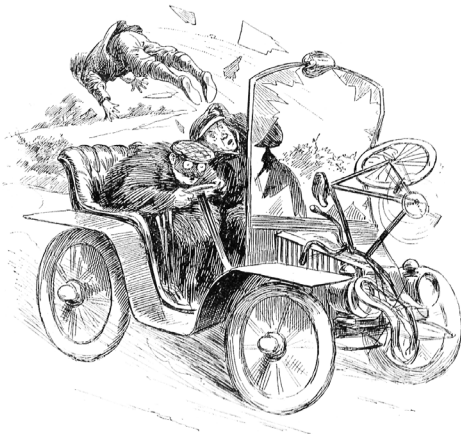
Today, though, the problem of scientism—which has been around since the MSI's beginnings—can be harder to inveigh against, mostly because the political underpinning is much slipperier. Recently, DNAinfo reported that the vast majority of the newly hatched chicks in the genetics exhibit are sent to the Lincoln Park Zoo to become fodder for snow leopards, snakes, and other animals. One can sort of imagine everyone's healthy, justified disgust for someone who stood at the hatchery sharing this fact with every tween who passed by. It seems akin to telling them that Santa Claus isn't real, or that *808s & Heartbreak* is Kanye's best album: a needlessly iconoclastic way to spoil somebody else's fun. In some ways, this essay might be reminiscent of that attitude; after all, it's *good* that the MSI is fun,

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and is able to instill a sense of wonder about science in the (many, many) children that visit it every day, right?

But it still seems that even if we want everybody to appreciate the awesome abilities of science, we can still want them to turn a critical eye toward its limitations, even from a young age. This is especially true of a museum where so many of the exhibits are sponsored by companies and organizations who have a vested interest in making sure the side of the story most favorable to them is told. I think there's room for a better MSI, one that's entertaining but even-handed, thoughtful without being too dry. One could start, for example, by devoting more space to the solutions being developed for something like climate change, or expanding on the hard times industrial laborers have historically suffered. Above all, it would be a museum that helped its patrons understand that science and, more obviously, industry can never truly exist in a vacuum, but will always be bound up with certain political and social norms that we should be aware of.

There are, to be sure, brief nods to the problems scattered throughout the current museum: a mention of the dangerous conditions endured by many railroad workers, or a stone gargoyle ruined by acid rain. There is even an open forum of sorts, a room where people sit in chairs while being asked their opinion on certain questions of scientific ethics, like the acceptability of mind-enhancing drugs. When I walked by, though, nobody was participating, and understandably so: as far as attractions go, it pales in comparison to live lightning and climbing walls.



Writing Africa

Konje Machini

Journal entry from July 26th, 2015

I'm not sure why I've put off writing for so long. I'm only now doing it because I'm trying to kill time before dinner. I won't say that "killing time" is how I've spent a lot of my evenings but sometimes it's just that. Today I was supposed to go to a primate sanctuary. The plan fell through due to transportation difficulties. Instead went to some markets w/ Frank and after had lunch. This was not before some initial hesitation when Frank told me of a recent bombing by Boko Haram in the far north and a threat made against the president about an attack on Yaoundé. The specter of Boko Haram has haunted many conversations. Just yesterday someone asked the question of me "if I was with them." I replied "yes" thinking he had meant Frank. It's b/c of my hair's length. I think I might cut some of it soon.

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This is a journal entry from the summer I spent in Cameroon. It's a strange thing, but I can't help but write journal entries as if they will be discovered when I die. So I am always writing for an audience other than future me. Depending on the experience, it does involve some careful doctoring and editing—not necessarily of my own thoughts, but of how I portray them. This process becomes a politics of portrayal whenever I talk, write, or even tweet about the time I spent in Africa. I've been to three different countries on the continent, each further apart from the other as London is to Moscow, yet they are all considered "Africa." Whenever asked,

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"What was it like?" I'm forced to take up a defense of Africa. I am fighting to shed light on that "dark spot" on the globe. I am working against the poverty-porn pictures of smiling kids and statements akin to, "They have so little and yet they are so happy; you be grateful for what you have,"—something I (maybe unfairly) imagine spoken with a thick Mid-Western accent. At least this is the battle I've imagined for myself. Imagined or not, this is my

attempt to talk about this Africa. To do so, I'm not talking about my experiences in Africa, or Cameroon, or even Yaoundé, Cameroon, but rather the specific places, spaces, and faces I saw and engaged with. Ultimately, this is my story of dealing with difficulties as an American-born African trying to reconcile his own American-ness with his African identity.

Morocco

The summer of '14 I spent in Rabat, Morocco. It was the most racially aware I've ever been. It's not as if growing up black in the South, and going to the University of Chicago haven't been training enough. I think it was just the fear that comes along with being dropped in a new place without a proper briefing beforehand. I was expected to play my part perfectly, but no one gave me the script. Part of the discomfort stemmed from grasping to understand my relational identity—that is, what I think other people saw when they saw me. One might kindly call this racial awareness, or unkindly frame it as racial paranoia. Either way, it's all about your making calculations on how you are being or might be perceived. These dialogues are always internal and are rarely resolved. In Chicago and around Hyde Park I have my formula down. Being thrown into Morocco required some slight tweaking. After a while, I thought I had it figured out. When I was walking with other English-speaking foreigners I was black American—by myself I was black African. Being in Morocco took all my anxieties about identity as the son of Kenyan

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immigrants and threw them back in my face repeatedly, and occasionally with humor. In the famed souks of Fez, and Marrakech I was saved doing the messy guesswork of how I was seen; the vendors took to calling tourists the names of celebrities they vaguely resembled. I was Danny Welbeck, the English footballer at Arsenal, I was *Training Day* Denzel Washington, 2008 Barack Obama, and much to my

annoyance, Chris Brown. These moments felt more playful than offensive. This was me as black American.

I remember my first moment of being interpolated as black African. It was early on in my time in Morocco, and it was part of an interaction I've become quite familiar with. This is the habit of showing some sign of recognition—a smile, head nod, “hello”—to other black folks I come across in non-black-folk spaces. A subtle reminder to myself and the other person that we're not alone here. A rather innocuous smile at a black man who looked about my age, sparked a conversation. He was from Senegal and had assumed I was, too. After clearing things up we talked for a bit. Still fresh to the city, I was eager for an insider's take. Instead I got a response of an outsider, or at least of somebody locked out of the inside. It was not easy being black in Rabat. Although I was in Africa, this was not the Africa I had imagined.

Cameroon

I spent part of the summer of '15 in Cameroon for an internship, working as a research assistant at a hospital in the capital, Yaoundé. My time working was spent tooling around on Excel, organizing folders, and loading my TV shows using the office Wi-Fi. I stayed in the hospital district of the city, in a dorm of the hospital where I worked. My first day at the hospital, I was paraded around as the American student doing research in the oncology department. Mistakenly, I was described as a medical student and not a lowly premed, a distinction that took some work on my part to explain. A bout of jet lag put me down at 2 p.m. the previous day only to wake up that night at 9, forfeiting my chances at dinner. Sleepy, hungry, scared, I wandered the hospital with my mentor. He was one of *les Grandes* of Cameroon. That, I quickly learned meant that he was very important and very busy. I didn't see much of him. The faces I saw were that of Yolande, Frank, and Dr. Carlson, all black.

I went my first week and a half in Cameroon without seeing a white person. There were black people for days! Black doctors, black taxi drivers, black bakers, black business people. I tried and failed several times to explain just how exciting this all was to my coworkers, who simply looked at me with faces that read as a mix between, "Yes, it's great," and, "Yes, what the hell were you expecting?" This was the Africa I had imagined and that had been imagined for me. I was just another face in a crowd—happily, I might add. There's a graphic novel called *Incognegro*, about an investigative journalist in the early 20th century who's black but can pass for white. Using this superpower, he investigates lynchings in the South. I, too, acquired this ability to go incognegro. In Cameroon I was no longer Chris Brown, or Danny Welbeck. I was Konjé (well, I was still Obama—but that only came up when my Kenyan and American heritage entered the conversation, and I was definitely okay with this comparison). Regardless, I was just another person walking around and doing my thing, no more or less suspicious or out-of-place.

At least, that was the case sometimes. Cameroon is bilingual—English in a small region in the west and French elsewhere. I was elsewhere and had to speak French. My French is good, but certainly not fluent. On top of that, my accent is tinged with inflections

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from Georgia, France, and Morocco, not ideal for Cameroon. All this meant that I stood a good chance of not sticking out until the moment I opened my mouth. If I kept the interaction short, I was golden—a curt, “Hello, how do you do?” would suffice as long as I moved quickly enough. But even this deception would sometimes fall apart. I found myself registering the look of confusion on a face, mixed with betrayal and a dash of embarrassment whenever I had to say more and reveal my secret identity. Maybe this was not my Africa.

I remember a conversation with my coworker Yolande in which she remarked that I dressed simply. This confused me because it sounded like an insult, but the smile on her face and every other interaction with her told me this wasn’t the case. After some deliberation and further explanation I got what she was trying to say: I didn’t dress like what she expected a black American to dress like! This was not a hurtful realization by any means. It was instructive, a reminder of the fact that I was American. Like in Morocco, I was always trying to figure out exactly where I stood in other people’s eyes. Often their expectations didn’t match up with reality, just like my own for Cameroon.



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Everyone who lives in Yaoundé, even if they were born there, has a house in the village. My friend Frank was no exception, and one weekend he invited me to go along for a visit to his family. I was excited to leave the city as the village offered promises of adventure. By coincidence, I had taken up an interest in anthropological writings on African witchcraft that summer. Anthropology as a discipline is kind of obsessed with witches. While many authors argue for the presence of witchcraft in the city as much as in the village, my friend Frank expressed a particular fear of village witchcraft, so I had to see for myself. That, along with promises of a meal of snake, meant that my village trip would be “truly memorable.” We arrived at his family’s place without much fanfare, after a fifteen-minute moto ride on a dirt road with four grown men carefully packed onboard. His cousin and her son were the only ones home. The compound included two structures, a house where people slept and another where food was stored and cooked. There was no electricity or running water. We had a small dinner of plantain, fish stew, and prunes, which we had knocked down from the tree growing in front of the house. After dinner we left. There was a complete quietness and a darkness like I hadn’t experienced before. There were no witches. We ate no snake.

Kenya

My plan after leaving Cameroon was to go to Kenya. Looking at how easy it is for one to travel from one place to another can give you a good idea of how a built environment structures where and how you can move. Think of the ways public transport in the city of Chicago works, with the proliferation of lines on the North Side, but with only a handful on the South. Just getting from Hyde Park to any neighborhood to the west requires you to first go to the Loop and then to your destination. A similar problem exists in Africa for intracontinental travel. These flights are not only costly, but will often have layovers in the metropole—London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and the new player, Dubai. Getting from Yaoundé to Nairobi was not looking easy. Google Maps suggested driving would take a cool fifty-eight hours. So instead I flew.

If Cameroon was visiting the old neighborhood where you used to live, travelling to Kenya was having Sunday dinner at the house you grew up in. Not only was this my first time visiting, but the

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first time any of my siblings were making the trip since my family left Kenya. The prodigal grandson, nephew, cousin, second cousin, returns, or rather just comes.

My delayed travel was not for a lack of trying but instead a lack of resources. Whenever anyone asks me the loaded question, "Where are you from?" I do a quick calculus. One, whether they are asking where I am from or where I am *from*. Two, whether or not I want to ignore the latter insinuation and coolly respond "Metropolitan Atlanta." Three, if they insist on the "*from*," asking myself if they will then go with the follow up of, "Oh! Have you ever been?" It was this last question that always managed to tear at the seams of my identity suit. Seams would completely unravel whenever a friend, or acquaintance would talk about going Kenya under the auspices of a service trip or safari. Who were these people to see my country before I did? It didn't matter: I was finally going to see the place myself, and I was dead set on getting more out of it than a picture with a bunch of smiling African children or a selfie with a giraffe. I ended up doing both.

Before getting to Kenya I was aware of my family there: names, pictures, the occasional visit, and the increasingly frequent friend request. These interactions went into forming a piecemeal image, but never really coalesced into a coherent picture of who made up my family. I had the scraps of an unfinished quilt. In order to finish it, my detail-oriented uncle drew up an itinerary for me. I was to cross the country and back over the course of about three weeks, meeting some forty or so family members.

Being the first branch of the family to move to America and the only ones there for some time, I feel like we were afforded some notoriety as we became known as the American cousins. They knew who I was, and while I had an idea of who a lot of them were, I clearly had some catching up to do. My guides on this journey were my two cousins from my dad's side, Abby and Iyan. It's a weird thing meeting family for the first time. Everything happens at an accelerated pace, a full range: comfort, discomfort, annoyance, love, laughter. With Abby and Iyan, and most of my family, this was the case. As we travelled from home to home, having more than

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our fair share of chapatti and chai, we got to know each other well. We did it all—safaris, dance clubs, the beach. To borrow a phrase from Study Abroad brochures, this was easily my most immersive travel experience. I had nobody with me who had the same set of references I did. This meant that most of my jokes never landed, and on top of that I was left out of all jokes cracked in Swahili. I weirdly found myself in the position of defending America and my way of life to my cousins. To finish with the language of immersion, I was chest-deep in Kenya and was not as strong a swimmer as I thought.

At some point in my travels I took leave of my two trusty guides to visit my mother's family in the west of Kenya, near Lake Victoria. This part of the country greatly differs from the deliciously green rolling hills of my father's land. It was muddy, but oddly dry, cool, but hot. The lake dominated the landscape in an understated way. It was if the lake was self-aware and so confident in its own size and beauty that it wasn't compelled to scream at us for attention—a sleepy, disinterested giant. It was stunning.

It was here that I met my cousins from my mother's late sister Maureen. Their parents both died some years ago, and now the



The Golden Ships were not much heavier than ours of Wood.

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oldest girl, a year younger than me, takes care of her two younger brothers with the help of our aunts and uncle. I travelled there with my mother's sister and her son, my cousin. We were to stay at the home of my mom's cousin. The house was a few miles from Lake Victoria, but even closer to another, much smaller lake—Lake Simbi. It sat in a crater of sorts and was surrounded on all sides by a low cliff. When I saw the lake, there was a thin sheet of resting flamingos, not quite the highlighter-pink of lawn ornaments, but closer to Pepto-Bismol. All this was down the street from "Obama Road." Yes, that Obama. This is the part of the country where our president's father was born, aka Obamaland.

I had come here to visit the place where my mother had grown up. While driving around the area I was given brief history lessons about my mom's own life, sprinkled in with some Obama family trivia. The house where my mom grew up was a bit further from where we were staying. We spent a day at my mom's ancestral home, so to speak. Her step-mother insisted on preparing us a meal of chicken stew before we returned. At the house we were stayed we spent most of our time playing outside because there was no electricity. It acted as an easy sort of social lubricant between the boys and me. But this didn't really work with my cousin Francissca, with whom I only managed to connect on my last day.

The last day I was there was also her birthday. Whenever it is my birthday, my mom always gives me money equal to my age. My cousin was turning twenty, so I figured I keep the tradition alive as my mom's representative. I found the money and wrote a brief birthday note on a postcard I had been saving for a rainy day from Morocco. As I said my goodbyes to her, I gave her the gift. She thanked me and I continued saying goodbye to the rest of my cousins. Departure in Kenya is less a discrete moment and more of a process, so we were around for quite some time after saying our preliminary goodbyes. Before we actually left, Francissca came back to me, crying. I was briefly thrown off, and was unsure of what was wrong. She managed to get out between sobs, explaining to me that this was her first birthday present ever. I really didn't know what to feel.

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I remember lamely consoling her. I remember thinking, *Should I have given more? Less? At all? Why do I feel such a deep ache? Because you don't deserve this gratitude, because you have not really been there for her until this moment, and because you now feel tied to her and her brother's future. Because interdependence scares you a lot, because you prize your independence: because you are American.*

I didn't share any of these thoughts with her or anyone back home for a while. I felt ugly and ashamed, guilty. It was this feeling of guilt that repulsed me. It was this guilt—and its nasty relative “burden”—that spurned and motivated so many before me to go “save” the continent. Why the hell did twenty dollars give me so much pause? How did I get sucked into the very thinking I wanted to destabilize? How much of a critique could I make from within the very mindset? I was stuck doing complex mental judo between my American and my African identity.

This moment of crisis was my response to a burden of representation, the immense task of writing against years of accumulated images of a dark continent. I was censoring and filtering all my thoughts, reactions, and emotions so as not to represent Africa as it had already been presented. This was the burden of having perfect politics while navigating a world that was a break from what I had experienced before.

It made me want to avoid talking about going to the village, the souk, the safari, for fear of reifying an image of the exotic. It pushed me away from discussing feelings of alienation in Kenya, Morocco, and Cameroon for fear of losing my claim to Africanness. All these conflicts left me mute. In staying silent on this idea of Africa, I was giving power to that image.

Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe says that Africa, discursively, is always relational—opposed to the



Very good Navigators they were.

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West. As relational, the images or expectations of Africa then reveal more about the person imagining than the real place. What did my own expectations about Africa reveal about me? I was looking for a place where I belonged. In Morocco I couldn't find this. In Cameroon, I knew I came close. And in Kenya, I realized what it was I was looking for: these people, my family who were only names before they had sprouted faces, bodies, personalities all in the course of three weeks. They welcomed

me warmly and relentlessly and tried to make Kenya, Africa a home to me. My travels in Africa have not led to the sudden discovery of my African self, but rather have been instructive moments in an ongoing process of understanding that part of myself, along with my many others. I am still figuring out, and will be for a while, what any of this means.

My last day in Kenya was as remarkable as the rest, even if it was spent packing and repacking my bags as opposed to lounging on the beach or spotting lions. The process of my departure was an all-day affair. Aunts, uncles, and cousins sprinkled across Nairobi all gathered to see me off. We ate and laughed and took many photos. When it was time to roll out, I was surprised to discover that all twenty or so of us would be headed to the airport in four different cars. This was truly a kingly send-off. I think that prior to visiting, I would have been annoyed by a gesture like this (logistics aside). But I felt so honored. We all huddled together in line—I didn't have to carry a single bag up to the door. With twenty hugs and a promise to return, I left Kenya.

Corporations and Human Rights

An Interview with Charlotte Walker-Said

Elisabeth Huh

Can corporations actually help protect human rights? In their co-edited volume, *Human Rights In The New Global Economy: Corporate Social Responsibility?*, John D. Kelly and Charlotte Walker-Said have organized a comprehensive collection of articles that investigate the complex concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and explore the potential for corporations to serve as a vehicle to defend and develop human rights.

Elisabeth Huh is a third-year in the College majoring in Fundamentals and minoring in Human Rights.

In the introduction to the book, Walker-Said, assistant professor of Africana studies at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, explains that CSR is both a developing conceptual framework, which seeks to apply market-oriented strategies to government, development practice, and humanitarian intervention, and a growing movement to create ethical corporate cultures. Since corporations define these ethical standards for themselves, the practice of CSR varies considerably in extent and focus, ranging from codes of environmental responsibility, to vows to provide humane labor conditions, to efforts to maintain sustainable economic development in developing countries.

Professors Kelly and Walker-Said explain that CSR has enormous global human rights implications. Current human rights scholarship is fixated primarily upon traditional rights enforcement and protection mechanisms—nation-states, international law, non-governmental organizations, and humanitarian intervention systems. However, both authors argue that corporations have

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acquired enormous power not only in the economy, but in societies across the world, thus wielding tremendous potential to influence and determine human rights outcomes.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I describes CSR as a relationship between communication and coercion—it investigates how activism and negotiation on the part of citizens, institutions, and organizations can produce greater corporate accountability. In Part II, legal scholars envision the creation of international regulatory mechanisms that could hold corporations accountable for human rights on a global scale. Some scholars explain how these mechanisms could parallel the human rights norms already established through international laws, declarations, and treaties by construing the failure to meet certain standards of “corporate responsibility” as corporate “criminal liability.” Finally, Part III examines the relationship between CSR and human rights in Africa, where corporate activity exerts a significant influence on human welfare. The authors in this section note that the power of multinational corporations often match or challenge that of the state, raising questions about the salience of state sovereignty and its relationship to human rights.

In the preface to the book, Professor Kelly argues that current approaches to human rights scholarship have remained siloed within discrete disciplinary perspectives, yielding deeply nuanced but sharply limited insights into the complexity of CSR. He argues that anthropologists can peer into the judgments and motivations that drive CSR, and they can use this knowledge to help produce and predict certain outcomes. However, he notes that anthropological diagnoses can quickly precipitate a number of utopian fantasies when they lose contact with the concrete facts that other disciplines provide. Legal scholars, historians, and policy experts fill this gap, contributing detailed knowledge of laws, corporate practices, organizational and institutional infrastructures, and histories of humanitarian practices and interventions that allow us to critically discuss the best practices for the assessment, repair, development, and implementation of CSR.

Still, CSR raises additional key political and philosophical

questions. Why should private institutions have a responsibility to aid the public good? Can corporations be treated like people? To what extent? On what grounds? Can corporations act from incentives other than profit? Just as the concept of the Western state has evolved over the course of history—from the Hobbesian monolith that constrained our evil nature to maintain social order and security, to a Lockean model, compacted to protect humanity's newly realized rights and liberties, to the modern welfare state that seeks to meet additional social needs—the role of the corporation may also change in response to developing public needs, new social convictions, and concerted civic pressure.

CSR's potential to protect human rights on a global scale also urges us to reflect on the salience of state-sovereignty and the very concept of governance. Can CSR truly emerge as a powerful force within international human rights, as the various scholars in this book suggest? And if so, will it simply aid the nation-state in its efforts to protect human rights, or, as Walker-Said suggests, could it create a new transnational system of governance that replaces the nation-state as the paradigmatic model for human rights and security guarantees? What would happen if a corporation could govern? Could it truly respond to the entire spectrum of needs that belong to a deeply human existence?

[This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.]

In the introductory chapter of your book you write, "Is the corporation a crucible or an obstacle for the global human rights order? A benefactor or nemesis? The time has come for serious inquiry into the under-studied but critical relationship between corporations and human rights and the trend toward codes and practices of corporate social responsibility." What was the impetus that compelled you to investigate the relationship between corporations and human rights?

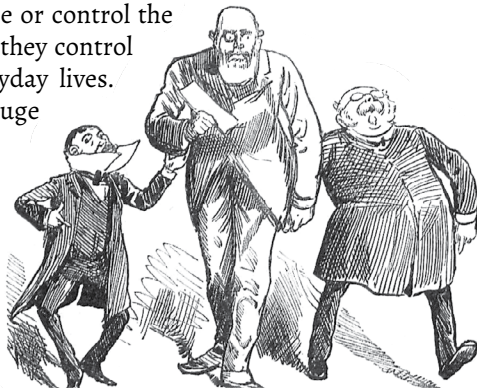
Charlotte Walker-Said: That is a great question. I was asked by the University of Chicago Human Rights Program, which is now called the Pozen Center, to think about some of the most pressing issues in human rights today. I am a historian, I am trained as a historian, and a lot of human rights catastrophes that exist today are

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a result of long-term human rights failures. There are very few, other than an earthquake or just a few other natural disasters, that arise out of nowhere. A lot of humanitarian crises evolve over time as a result of other kinds of human rights failures. The Human Rights Center had done a symposium on statelessness—a very interesting topic; human rights right now are only guaranteed by states. If you are not a member of a nation-state, there are really no strong legal mandates to protect your rights. So there have been some very interesting conferences on statelessness, and then another interesting conference on refugees and migration. I wanted to go in a little bit of a different direction and think about an alternative framework of the nation-state. The reason we have refugee crises and various forms of civil conflict is that states are in fact weak, or weaker than the international order ideally wants them to be.

So what are some of those things that are causing state weakness, and who are the agents who are stronger than states? So I began to think about the rise—in the United States, but also across the world—of global capitalism and global capital as being truly powerful and transformative. It has become the leitmotif of the 21st century: global capitalism and foreign direct investment. Capital really is mobile. It is constrained by very few laws and very, very few obstacles. Capital moves very easily in the age of financial technology and increasing mobility of global corporations—how they can move their operations, their factories, have their sources around the world. They truly are a transnational entity, and as such they have a lot of power and a lot of wealth. They control human rights outcomes. They don't dictate or control the realm of human rights, but they control outcomes for people's everyday lives. So they can have a really huge impact on human rights.

So, I began to think about the corporation and its power in relation to the nation-state and its power in relation to what we think of political



The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers.

actors. The corporation considers itself a political actor. It considers itself an economic agent, but in fact its work is deeply political, so I thought it would be interesting to have a book that really looks at this, about how others are starting to see corporations as political agents and about how corporations are themselves, interestingly enough, starting to see themselves as political agents as well. They are taking up the mantle of rights politics in a way that they never have before. So I thought that would be interesting to publish a book about.

I thought your chapter on corporate social responsibility and sustainability in Africa was really fascinating. I think that most people perceive corporate activity in the developing world solely through a negative lens—we primarily hear horrific accounts of large multinational corporations violating human rights and the environment—but your chapter argues that corporations in developing countries are actually starting to choose to defend human rights and the environment by adopting sustainability doctrines. You show how various corporations are now accepting responsibilities to maintain political stability, manage climate risk, and provide fair wages, among other protective functions, because these measures actually allow them to safeguard their growth and their profits. To my knowledge, this is currently a limited phenomenon, and I want to know if you have any insight into what specific factors or conditions help motivate corporations to adopt these doctrines of sustainability.

I think what's interesting in this framework is that the largest multinationals are the most conservative about sustainability. They have the most to lose from excessive or irresponsible behavior, and so a company like BP is a bad example of this. BP is an enormous multinational that operates across the globe. They're in the Arctic Circle, they're in the Gulf of Mexico, they're in Nigeria, they're in the Middle East. They're truly global, and they're famous along with Shell, another multinational, for being irresponsible. Their accidents and their violations of environmental and social rights are widely publicized. They have horrible press. So they're examples of large companies who are not interested in sustainability and they often become a poster-child for the irresponsible global multinational.

I do think there are, however, other companies, especially mining

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companies, which can be widely responsible whether they're set up small-scale or locally based, or if they're large-scale like AngloGold Ashanti or Anglo American. These companies can actually be very concerned with human welfare, environmental welfare, and, of course, their financial welfare, because they really do care about hedging their bets. Labor unrest, environmental crisis, they see as a threat to their bottom line, in a more visceral way than BP or Shell often do. So, I think in the age of falling oil profits, environmental and social human rights violations may actually become more costly to oil companies, though they haven't proven to be as costly as they should be. But mining companies, whose profit margins have been historically lower than oil companies, have been in some or many cases extremely concerned with environmental and social rights. It's never perfect, it's never a company that's run like a humanitarian organization, they're certainly extractive and their work causes a lot of damage. But in these necessary industries—people are never going to live without steel, they're never going to live without iron, they're never going to live without coltan—these are necessary minerals and metals that basically power our everyday lives. So although the work that they do is damaging, they do a certain amount of sustainability measuring: environmental, social, and even political. They try to make sure that the nation-state doesn't nationalize the mine and nationalize the corporation so they can guarantee their investments. They are, of course, selfish in that way as well.

So I think there are examples of large multinationals who operate across the Global South in particular, because that's where we find a lot of timber, a lot of mining. Still, the Global South happens to be those resource-rich territories that these multinational corporations seek. And so these territories in the Global South also happen to have very weak states and you can have a very toxic environment when you have these very powerful corporations and these weak states that are very poor with politically marginalized people. And I see these corporations, and again this does not make media profit; it does not work in the realm of catastrophe. Sustainability doctrines and CSR avoid catastrophe, so that doesn't really become news.

You actually have to do quite a bit of research to find out the



positive preventive kind of work that corporations do, simply because that's something that's not very interesting for the media narrative of corporate social responsibility. But I do think that there's actually an interior struggle within the corporate world between irresponsibility on the one hand, and, on the other, taking measures that are not enforced by law, but are increasingly becoming enforced by code, and by frameworks of cooperational ethics that are nonbinding. And these measures increasingly encourage corporations to act in a different way towards sustainability. I do see many positive stories, because it would be hard to imagine a better outcome in the current day, where we do have very powerful capital and very weak states.

Your response and the chapters in your book seem to posit that the corporation is starting to eclipse the power of weak states and actually to develop into a new locus of trans-governmental political authority. You state that these growing powerful corporations are luckily choosing to adopt these ethical initiatives because they coincide with their interest in protecting their bottom line. However, if corporations actually did acquire more political power, do you think we could truly always trust them to regulate themselves in an ethical way?

So this is really like a game-theory question. Do you create a game, basically a market, where corporations are bound by certain ethical norms across the globe? Where nation-states don't compete to be the most, or should I say, the least protective of their citizens and of their environments? Because right now that is really the situation—where nation states can compete and they can say, we are business-friendly, or, we are open to investment, we have a liberal regulatory environment—and so corporations are basically incentivized to seek out the lowest bidder. So that compels the corporation to act strategically, as anyone would. You would like to invest in a country

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with the least hassles. You can decide for yourselves how much you want to pay their workers, to pollute their environment, etc., and you can be bound by your own code, and if you are a large multinational who is concerned with brand reputation, you might actually enforce some standards. But if you're a small company from Greece or a family-owned logging company from Lebanon, you really aren't going to care at all about being destructive or punitive to your workers, because your company is never going to make the press. It's just never going to happen. So, I think the self-policing has its limits.

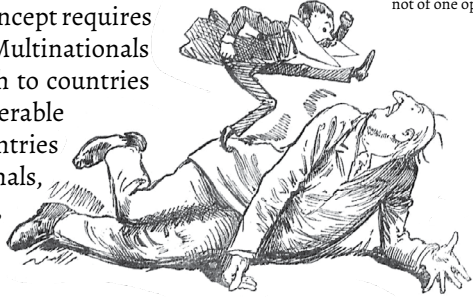
What would be better, really, would be a global framework that would be binding, that would regulate investment and regulate everything from taxation to environmental impact to labor protections, etc. But that kind of global governance, that isn't in the realm of frameworks or norms that work to enforce some sort of global standards. That is probably a very long way off, if not nearly impossible. I think we are, for the next few decades, wedded to the self-policing, non-binding, self-governing framework that we have among corporations, and I think it really is up to activists to have these watchdog groups and media pressure to make corporations feel as if they are in the public eye. They are public actors and they have reputations just like a person would. And their reputations can impact their bottom lines, so I think that activists, investors, media pressure will be the only real enforcers. Those kind of global frameworks that would bind all these countries to mandate that corporations act in a certain way in their countries, there's going to be a lot of reluctance to do that, especially among the poorest nations who are the hungriest for investment.

As these large multinational corporations gain more and more power, especially in developing countries, do you think they will hinder the growth of smaller businesses?

That's an interesting question. I'm not an expert on this, but I believe that there are cases in which a multinational can push out small businesses. But a lot of times multinationals don't push out small businesses, because they can even support small businesses. They can depend on small businesses for the supply chain. It really depends on the industry, whether it's apparel, or artisanal mining,

but I think the small-business concept requires very contextualized research. Multinationals can bring a great deal of growth to countries and can provide considerable opportunities. So a lot of countries really welcome multinationals, multinational grocery chains, apparel companies, because they really do feel like the growth is perceptible. But yes, occasionally countries will push out all businesses and lead to negative growth, not positive growth.

Concerning the heat of the Sun, they were not of one opinion.



I know that you spent a few years working in Africa, and I was wondering if your experiences or observations of corporate behavior there influenced the development of your ideas for this book.

Yes, I was very, very interested in international fruit companies. Dole has some farms in Cameroon, and a number of American-based agricultural multinationals have bases in Africa and their operations are definitely debatable. They come into question a lot and right now there is a big debate in Ghana. Ghana and the Ivory Coast are some of the biggest exporters of cocoa, and they have come under fire because most of the cocoa-growing in Ghana and the Ivory Coast is done on family farms. The family has to grow cocoa and then they bring the cocoa to a depot, you know like a giant factory or a warehouse, and then they weigh it and then they're paid, similarly to coffee in Ethiopia. They're just totally family-run farms. They're not like plantation-style, where everyone's a wage laborer on a giant commercial farm. Most cocoa and coffee in many parts of Africa, they're just families that grow it in their lots. And as it is a family business, children are used for labor. That is a long-standing custom throughout Africa, of using small children as labor, whether they water, whether they weed, whether they cut down trees to sell. Whether or not that is child-labor-like, making a child work in a factory ten hours a day, whether all child labor is the same and whether it is all to be criminalized via international law, or whether there is a space in a society where children only go to school in the morning, or children only go to school two days a week, whether there is an

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institutional capacity to offer children alternatives anyway, whether using a child on a family farm should be criminalized, and whether a company should pull out—there's a question of Cadbury and Nestle, if they should pull out of Ghana, because Guineans and Ivorians are using child-labor. And the question is a really complex one, and as someone who has studied these societies and knows their history that largely has had hundreds of years of this labor, and the children don't see this as exploitative, they see this as participating in a family business. So to pressure a corporation to leave a country entirely, to basically rob tens of thousands of people of their livelihoods, because the question of child labor is a sticky one? That kind of debate is very interesting to me.

I fall on the side of, I think this really has to be contextualized and considered, what child-labor really is. And all child labor is not the same, and companies should not be penalized for investing in countries where families benefit enormously. The Ivory Coast and Ghana actually have very decent economies and very workable incomes for many families who produce cocoa, because they would literally be reduced to starvation if the cocoa industry were to collapse. So there are bigger questions than “we have to enforce human rights” in this broad scheme.

This is a kind of question that I find interesting, and I think that the notion of corporate social responsibility in that case is an interesting one. How could they improve the lives of those children, instead of just pulling out of the country entirely? Could there be non-profit schools, could there be corporate-funded sports-activity programs? That could be very cheap for the corporation to invest in, and it could alleviate some of the child-labor obligations on children while at the same time promoting business on small family farms in these countries. That's a better solution than divestment, in my opinion. But, that's the kind of debate that has to be a little more sophisticated than simply condemning corporations for “working in countries with child labor.”

I have two questions in response to that. If corporations primarily seem to be protecting human rights in order to protect their bottom line—to safeguard their growth and profits—do you think that other human rights,

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such as cultural rights, for example, will just go ignored and unprotected because they may not turn out to be valuable according to a profit-driven calculus? My second question, which I think is kind of related, is what political authority is going to be able to judge whether or not certain types of child labor are acceptable, and then force corporations to comply with these judgments on protecting human rights?

For that last question, I think that we really are stuck with the policing mechanism of the market. No matter how loud or active activists are, we know that nation-states are more and more reluctant to regulate corporations. We are working in a very liberal regulatory moment for global capital. Even in the United States, we have a fairly liberal regulatory environment, and especially in some states. I think the nature of fracking will demonstrate that very easily, that the environmental and social fallout from fracking has been ignored. I think that state and local governments are willing to let those kinds of violations occur in the name of natural gas investment. So, again, I think that the market will kind of be the only regulating force—that of activist pressure, of brand reputation, of the lack of sustainability.

A lot of these companies are publicly traded, and if they have unsustainable business models, they will run themselves into fines, to public outcry, to litigation, which are great tools. All of those things are liabilities and they aren't sustainable. So, the market will push the market share, the value price of that corporation to decline, and its investment lure will be reduced. So there is great potential in activism, litigation, and regulation, even modest regulation, in determining the market value of a corporation, and I think that will most effectively incentivize a corporation to change their behaviors.

Will corporations ever act as more social actors, in service of something other than their bottom line? Well, yes, sometimes they can, if there are certain incentives that cause them to have social concerns. But they are very profit-driven. By their natures they don't see themselves as very political or social, they see themselves as financial and commercial. And I think that will remain even if they may become more concerned with culture and environment.

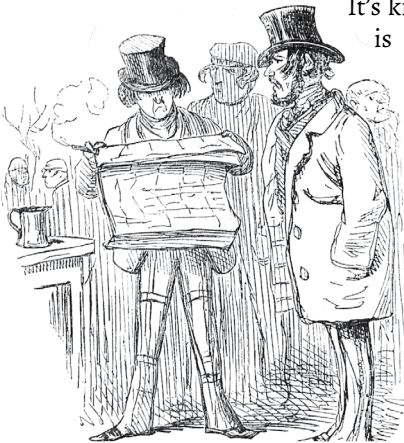
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They are still seeing it through the lens of profit, but I don't think that's necessarily a negative thing. Again, that can be harnessed to incentivize them in the right direction.

Many people are critical of corporations that try to brand their socially responsible ethos. For example, some people are critical of Starbucks or Toms shoes—which gives a small percentage of their profits away to charitable causes, or donates a pair of shoes with every purchase—because there's something kind of morally suspect about buying a product that seems to offer moral absolution included with the price of consumption. Do you think that these criticisms of moral perversion in corporate social responsibility are valid? And do you see any other ways in which corporations, especially in the U.S., can practice social responsibility?

Sure. There's actually another movement going on right now called the B Corps, or benefit corporations. Corporations have to go through very strict audit and review processes before they can be labeled a benefit corporation. Everyone from a caterer to a dry-cleaner can act under that certification. I think that is a movement. There's Toms or Starbucks—people can consider that weak sauce [laughs] weak ethical movements, but these are all soldiers in a growing army of corporations and customers and social entrepreneurs who are more and more concerned with generating social welfare from private enterprise. I do think this is a considerable movement. If you look up benefit corporations, it is one of the fastest-growing certifications.

It's kind of like a LEADS certification, which is an environmental certification for buildings. Many companies want to have this certification, they want to be able to promote that they are a benefit corporation, like Toms or Starbucks, like for every cup of coffee or for every shoe you buy, you're doing something good in the world. There are certain direct marketing incentives for that. People like buying things when they feel good about doing it. They like to feel good. "Feel-good capitalism" is sort of a glib criticism, but I do think



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that there's something to their momentum, and there's something to the fact that this is a growing movement, it's not really just a blip on the radar or a passing fad.

This is a movement that has been growing every year for more than a decade now. It seems to be getting bigger now. I think this has a possibility to transform from feel-good capitalism to an actual ethical and social movement. I think that has yet to be seen, I think it's too soon to say that this is a broad-scale resolution in consumer capitalism, but I do see it growing. So I do think that's a considerable step forward in B Corps certification and socially-minded corporate marketing campaigns and foundation orientations.

In the U.S. do you think there is going to be a movement to make this sort of corporate social responsibility a legal obligation?

Interesting. I don't think so. I think it will remain voluntary, but I don't think that will make it less powerful or less effective. Of course, I think regulation would be better, I believe in regulation as well, but I just don't see that being realistic. I mean, not even liberals, democratic presidents or politicians have vocally supported regulation. No matter what side of the political spectrum one seems to be on these days, regulation is pretty much off the table. So, there really isn't a left-right debate about this anymore. It's not just Republicans. There are not many politically strong voices for regulation. So I think it will continue to be voluntary, but I still think that could be considerable and still be powerful.

Do you think that there is anything that individual citizens can do to hold companies accountable, apart from boycotting their products or services?

Once you become an investor or become interested in broader financial instruments that all of us become bound to, whether they be pensions or 401Ks, you sort of become conscious investors. Not just conscious consumers but conscious investors. I think there's something important up to that as well. Also, I think just being aware of how things are being made in the world. So I think that public awareness and knowledge of both financial and commercial enterprises are important.

Looking Back

For our tenth anniversary, we combed through the archives for pieces that caught our eye. They ran the gamut: from manifestos to book reviews to op-eds to interviews to research projects to personal essays. What follows isn't a "greatest hits" list, nor is it supposed to be a representative history of the magazine over the years. Instead, it's something in between. We picked these excerpts because—one way or another—they were just plain interesting. You can find our past issues and read more at <http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/archive>.

Rita Koganzon
"Teaching For Global Domination"
Winter 2006

The danger of orienting our political society towards the goal of continual economic dominance is significant. It means subordinating political principles to the fluctuating dictates of the market—liberty to productivity, rights to innovations—in such a way that principles become relative and only competition remains absolute. Whatever measures serve to keep us ahead of China are acceptable. This is no abstract experiment, but the very real policy of states like the former Soviet Union, which used the government's educational apparatus as a weapon during the Cold War, heavily emphasizing math and science at the expense of all else and then channeling students into technical fields where they might best serve national military and strategic ambitions. Nor was such an abuse of public education at odds with the Soviet political constitution. The

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government existed solely to direct the economy, so no subsequent need to train citizens to be anything other than workers ever arose. The Soviet political principles that allowed for and followed from such ambitions hardly need illumination.

Yesha Sutaria

“‘Real ID’ Capable of Anything But”

Fall 2006

REAL ID hinges on definitions and classifications that are so broad and sweeping that they widely clear the bar for dangerously ambiguous terminology that had been set by its progenitor, PATRIOT. This did not stop the House from passing the bill (261-161-11) on February 10, 2005; the House’s willingness to pass any legislation even remotely aimed at combating terrorism is rivaled only by that of the Senate. To be fair, the Senators did go through the motions of debating the bill on its merits, which allowed them to put off passing it for a couple of months. This seemingly unnecessary delay made Sensenbrenner nervous, however, so he pulled the legislative equivalent of a cheap parlor trick: he latched the Act onto a military spending bill as a rider, thereby ensuring its passage via unanimous Senate approval on May 10, 2005.

Alex Beinstein

“Questions for Michelle Obama”

Fall 2007

Michelle Obama: More often than not, [women] are the primary caretakers of our children—scheduling babysitters, planning play dates, keeping up with regular doctor’s appointments, supervising homework, handing out discipline. Usually, we are the ones responsible for ensuring that the household runs smoothly: cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, home repairs.

And for those of us who work outside of the home as well, we have the added challenge of coordinating these responsibilities with our jobs. If a child gets sick, we are the ones who are juggling our schedules to be home with them. If a toilet overflows, we are the ones frantically rescheduling that 9 a.m. meeting so that we

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can meet the plumber. And when all of that is said and done, we have the added social pressure and expectation to be attractive, charming and delightful mates—well groomed, in good spirits, ready to be supportive of our significant others.

I'm tired just thinking about it all. So I think what it comes down to is that women and families are not getting the support that they need to thrive. We have spent the last decade talking a good game about Family Values, but I haven't seen much evidence that we actually value women or families. We have been ignored and we must take better care of ourselves and our community, and our government needs to give us the support to do so.

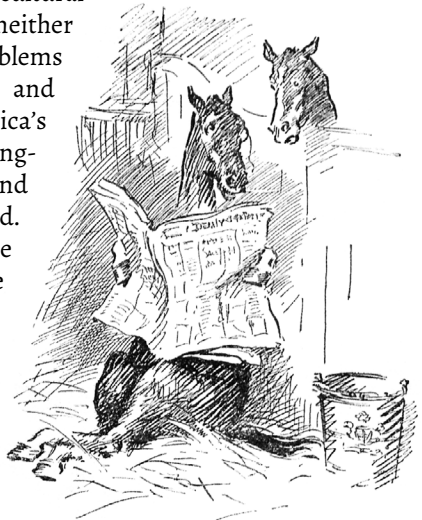
Gabriel Cahn

"Towards A Postmodern Conservatism"

Fall 2007

Conservatism, properly understood, should attempt to preserve variety, cultural and economic, in American life. The wholesale embrace of a corporate culture attempting to homogenize America in the name of efficiency and profit is a fundamentally progressive position. While large scale government regulation does not provide a conservative solution to the cultural problems created by big business neither does the acceptance of these problems as a *fait accompli*. Instead private and local attempts to preserve America's "proliferating intricacy of long-established social institutions and modes of life" should be applauded. Postmodern conservatives, like Dreher, have attempted to create truly conservative alternatives to the flattening uniformity brought about by the *laissez-faire* dogmas of the Reagan generation....

The arrogance and disregard of the so-called conservatives



As swift as an Arrow out of a Bow.

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in the current administration for humility, prudence, and other truly conservative values has created room for true debate about the benefits of the modernist ideal. In practice, politicians cannot couch their arguments in the same terms as conservative critics of modernity without appearing radical. However, the aberrant appeal of “anti-establishment” candidates such as Ron Paul or Barack Obama show how exhausted most Americans are with the modern consensus that has reigned supreme in Washington during the Bush and Clinton administrations. Conservatism, despite its tarnished reputation, can still be a salutary force in American democracy. Conservatism should remind us in an ever-changing world of the continuity of permanent things. However, to renew their political movement, conservatives must admit the crimes, and there have been real crimes, that they have been committed in the name of conservatism. Then conservatives must show that they are no longer willing to tolerate the politicians or the intellectuals who justified these crimes. They must begin a debate to define their fundamental values. They must be willing to find guidance not simply in hero-worship of Reagan or Bush but in more lasting conservative truths.

Margot Parmenter
“Talking about Torture”
Fall 2009

In early modern France, torture comprised the accepted legal institution. Unlike John Yoo’s memorandums, which retroactively approved the Bush administration’s narrow definition of torture and allowed the American government to circumvent the Torture Convention’s international prohibition of “cruel, inhumane, and degrading punishment,” the law of this period clearly allowed for—and, indeed, relied upon—two specific torture practices....

All of these methods were designed to inflict severe pain, but they were meant to do more than that. They were meant to elicit the truth. According to Lisa Silverman, a history professor at the University of Southern California, early modern Europeans conceived of truth as an entity connected to, even located within, the body. Rather than seeing truth as something arrived at through a conscious process of reasoning and discussion (as we do today),

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the early modern world saw it as an absolute entity attached to physicality. Thus, torture was understood as an effective way of discovering the truth about a matter. Though individuals (seen through a Christian worldview as inherently evil and corrupt) could dissimulate, their bodies could not, so that inflicting pain was a way of forcing the body to relinquish its secrets. As Silverman explicates, “Torture inflicted pain as a means of achieving the spontaneous truth of the body rather than the composed truth of the mind. Torture sought the evidence of an animate body.” The idea was this: because of original sin, the human consciousness could not be trusted to provide truth; pain, however, could dislocate the corrupt will, allowing the body to tell its story, a story the French justice system needed in order to punish criminals.

Jack Friedman

“The Real Culture War”

Winter 2011

But even beyond the numbers and the polls, a deeper culture of dissatisfaction with and distrust of government has been bubbling underneath the surface for quite some time. This often self-righteous anger is fairly irrational, considering that the major contributing factor is the government’s habit of capitulating to voters’ demands for record low taxes, record high spending, and their apparent aversion to any compromise whatsoever. Those who point out these increasingly embarrassing hallmarks of modern government are not necessarily decrying an expansion in its size or authority—in fact, it is a criticism commonly found across the policy spectrum. Their critique really highlights government’s inability to ask for any semblance of sacrifice or cooperation from an increasingly disengaged public.

Michael Lipkowitz

“Meditations on a Queer Canon”

Winter 2012

Following this seemingly paradoxical logic, a heteronormative canon and a queer canon can exist simultaneously. The canon we are left with is amorphous and changing, one that is determined by the needs of the individual, rather than by the needs of the society

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that surrounds him or her. This reminds us of Bloom's idea that the purpose of the canon is not to develop the individual as a social being, but rather as an individual with his or her own interiority. The purpose of books is not to direct us toward our Western society, but toward ourselves. It is as if Cunningham says, *what we need is a canon that shows us as we are....*

But at the end of our interior struggle, the choice of the works that govern our subjective, interior lives, can itself only be a subjective one. We choose whether our canon is Western or queer, or some mix. If the works of the Western canon do not answer to our "fresh sufferings," we can pitch them to the side and make our own canon.

Sara Stalla

"Shuffle, Ball[et], Change: African Influences on American Dance Forms"

Fall 2012

Black dance did not only have an influence on folk dances and comedy routines, but also on the "high art" of ballet. Coming to the U.S. from Russia, choreographer George Balanchine made radical innovations in balletic technique which were well-received. One could argue that his familiarity with his native country's own rhythmic and energetic folk dances eased the transition to the use of African styles—the cool aloofness of ballet and the cool aesthetic of African dance meshed well.

America's pervading performative tone and style were described as "not the aristocratic, haughty coolness of [traditional European ballet] but the cool arrogance of people with an attitude—Americans, black, brown and white" (*Digging the Africanist Presence in American*



The Palace was, as the Imperial City, all of Gold.

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Performance, 63). This pervading American coolness came from African coolness.... "All texts are intertexts," writes Gottschild. "To know one's culture and to play its game, but also to remember and keep one's own—that is and has always been the task" (*Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, 57).

Jordan Larson

"Notes on a Rookie: *Rookie Mag* and Feminism"

Winter 2013

Rookie greets contemporary feminism with plenty of conundrums as it resists a facile grasp of its implications. The magazine comes from a place of privilege, its existence an anomaly wrought by the flash popularity of its precocious, white, middle-class founder. It's ostensibly feminist, but *Rookie* shies away from many difficult topics. For example, there's no discussion of the intersection of race and class in women's oppression (not a particularly new or radical concept), and it lacks any other more brazen take on women's health or politics. On the other hand, the magazine has clearly connected with girls across the country, bypassing the more disparate mainstream media to give them a sense of hope and community. *Rookie* does not publish workout or dieting routines, "embarrassing" stories about boys knowing you're on your period (oh no!), or tips

on how to blow his mind in bed. It does contain articles on first encounters with the male gaze, plenty of tips on writing, and a discussion on reconciling an enjoyment of pop music with its entrenched misogyny....

The articles in *Rookie* push a new variety of expertise. In addition to the many reimagined magazine tropes—interviews, tutorials, and reviews—the diary form is central to much of *Rookie's* success. While many articles maintain a confessional



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tone and first-person perspective, the website also publishes a weekly “dear diary” feature in which staffers write about their personal lives. While clearly embodying a particular teen-girl stereotype and aesthetic, *Rookie*’s embrace of the diaristic form has overtly political and empowering implications. Author Kate Zambreno writes of the diary: “This is often the mode that allows her to come to writing—perhaps this is why it’s so widely derided as not literary or seen as raw material. Yet the diary is part of the girl’s process—a way to do the work. And of course now we write our diaries in public, for all to see.” Zambreno’s 2012 book *Heroines* mixed literary criticism and memoir, drawing largely from her blog *Frances Farmer is My Sister*. For Zambreno, the move to the Internet allows an intensely private form to become simultaneously public, the two extremes merging in online writing....

Similarly, there are other girls grasping for the heart of contemporary culture, albeit in much different (and less noted) ways than *Rookie*. Among those is *Rude Girl Mag*, a WordPress created by Bre Moore for women of color, partially in response to the homogeneity of *Rookie* and its exclusion of non-white perspectives. Geared toward women ages 18–25, the website is in many ways a *Rookie* corollary. Its tagline: “Cause we’re tired of being left out.”

Joshua Trubowitz

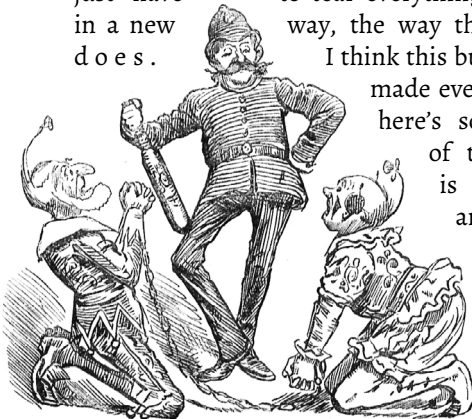
**“The Heart of the Political: An Interview with Martha Nussbaum”
Fall 2013**

Martha Nussbaum: The role that I see for the arts, or at least a big role for the arts in society, is to give pleasure and certainly beauty, but of a sort that brings us together and helps us overcome the anxiety of finite, bodily humanity. For example, in my little section on Millennium Park in Chicago, I say that it’s a wonderful example of a complex artwork that is funny, unifying, but, because of the way that it makes people recognize what’s comical and strange about the human body, is actually delightful, and we can celebrate it without thinking, “oh, now we want to be gods and we want to get rid of the body.” In short, I think it helps overcome racial anxieties, gender anxieties, and so on....

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Joshua Trubowitz: *The example of Millennium Park is particularly interesting because it is right next to Grant Park, which you mention in your book as well as an example of that problematic vision of beauty as purity, transcendence, and hierarchic greatness. But Grant Park will still be there, so how should the citizen in the aspiring society be oriented toward these two fundamentally incompatible ideals of beauty?*

MN: It's part of our history. It's part of who we are. And so I guess keeping them there reminds us of some difficulties we had in our past. I mean, what do I think of those buildings over there [points across the Midway to the Harper towers]? I talk about our campus in the same way. I think those buildings expressed an aspiration to be outside of time, outside of the community, and we surround them with different buildings which express different values—with the Robie House, which expresses a love of the earth, and then the Booth building—which I think is a wonderful building—which has both the horizontal and the vertical. And so we're saying, "yeah, we had that history, it's still there, but we now have a kind of wisdom about it and we can laugh at it." I think the Palevsky dorms laugh at it, and that's great, because it really did make people upset when they were first put in. We can also build it in to a structure like the new Booth building or the Logan Arts Center that alludes to it but transcends it in a good way toward greater inclusiveness and a greater embrace of the full city existence of this university. And so I don't think you just have to tear everything up, but you contextualize it in a new way, the way this building [the Law School] does.



I think this building, already in the late '50s, made everything different because now here's something on the south side of the Midway that, you know, is beautiful, but it's human, and its scale is human, and its whole design focuses on community and interaction. So I think that's what you do with the old; you just put it in a different context and you create a commentary upon it.

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Sabina Bremner

“What Does Literature Do for Us? *Ulysses*, shared realities, and subjectivity”

Spring 2013

This, then, is the real function of objectivity, to the extent that it is possible. We need confirmation that our version of reality makes sense. When we interact with others, we recount our realities according to an unspoken procedure in which we position ourselves as observers to our own experience and describe the discrete actions as if they were viewed externally, tacitly comparing realities. The real damage wrought by solitary confinement is that it deprives inmates of partaking in this “shared world” which, in a sense, characterizes being human. Subjective reality needs objective validation, which can only occur if the subjective experiences which constitute these inner realities are capable of being considered by others who arrive at them from different perspectives and thus contribute to a shared world. We experience life as so shared that our moment-to-moment streams of thought are secondary to their filtration into the language of objective experience—and so an episode like “Penelope,” in which an inner reality comprises an entire literary world, is alien to us. We can glean from *Ulysses* that no experience is entirely subjective: Even in the moment of perceiving something, to some extent we are always already divorcing ourselves from its immediacy.

Matthew Schweitzer

“Notes from the Abyss”

Fall 2014

Ahmed does not know if he had been targeted specifically, or if his home had fallen on some unmarked sectarian fault line that ruptured. He had received some vague threats a few months earlier regarding his political commentary, but nothing came of them. “I did not take these letters very seriously,” he says, “because there were no bullets in the envelopes or frightening phone calls at night”—the trademarks of serious assassination attempts professors have come to recognize. Since 2003, over 500 Iraqi academics have been killed by unknown factions. The universities are dangerous places to work

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or study, and the Interior Ministry admits that over 9,000 fake university degrees have been purchased by prominent civil servants. Younis is unsure how to comfort his friend. He faces an equally potent danger, as the Dean of International Relations at Mosul University. "It is very difficult to find any words to bring peace because I know there will be no peace, only words," he confides in his friend. "We all face terrible hardship and threat from every side, and sometimes it is necessary to let the sadness and weariness take over."

Jon Catlin

"After 9/11"

Winter 2014

Spiegelman suggests that such remembrance efforts actually helped America forget 9/11 as a real historical event. For stereotypically proud, cocky New Yorkers, this meant moving on quickly from 9/11: "On 9/11/01 time stopped. / By 9/12/01 clocks began to tick again... / You go back to thinking you might live forever after all!" For all Americans, the "Genuine Awe" of the attacks was "reduced to the mere 'Shock and Awe' of jingoistic strutting."

When I recently viewed newspaper front pages from September 12, 2001 on display at the Newseum in Washington D.C., I observed just how common this sentiment was. The *San Francisco Examiner* ran the headline "Bastards!" across an image of the burning towers. Others ran the headlines "Outrage," "Evil Acts," "Mass Murder," "War on America," "It's War," and "Bush Vows to Strike Back." (More measured headlines avoided these loaded labels and leaps to retaliation: "Terror," "Attacks Shatter Nation," "Unthinkable," and the poignant "We Mourn" allowed the tragedy to sink in—at least for one day.)

Hannah Nyhart

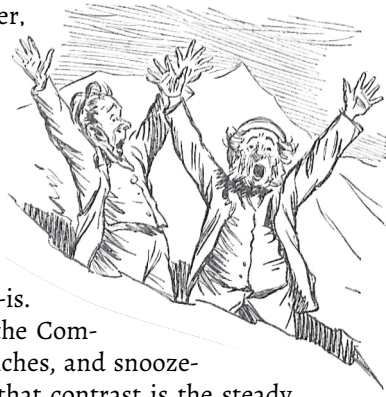
"Into the Clear Blue"

Fall 2014

At least a couple of times a term I come home from a long-but-good day and steal a glass of milk from my roommate and stand in the kitchen thinking, "Is this all there is?" Because it is a good life, but

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it feels like a small one. And I wonder, if I'd picked it out and strived toward it, instead of falling into it the way it feels I have, would it feel bigger? Or would it only look big from afar, and shrink once I'd gotten there.



A firm or solid Stone, of a vast bigness.

Unreached, a dream doesn't fit into the panorama view of life-as-is. The dream stands in contrast to the Com-Ed bills, and foil- wrapped sandwiches, and snooze-button parts of daily life. And in that contrast is the steady assurance that this isn't all there is.

That's why forty-five balloons and a lawn chair is as potent a dream as walking on the moon, or moving to the city, or the house you're going to build your folks when you make it. And it's also why they're all equally vulnerable. This is the dirty secret of dreaming: what happens after. I'm not sure there's a dream, however great, that isn't emptied as it's fulfilled. Once a dream is converted into an accomplishment, it becomes part of the daily panorama. And that question of whether there's more is back. You get used to the view from the new house, or of the city block. And even a moon rock, tucked onto the shelf next to the cereal boxes and the bills, must blend in eventually.

Angela Qian

"Interview with Monkey Business"

Spring 2015

Angela Qian: *Haruki Murakami's stories are famous for how he portrays adolescent and adult isolation, and alienation. From what I've read, I've noticed similar themes of transience and feeling alone in writers like Banana Yoshimoto, Yoko Ogawa, and Matsuda Aoko's story "Photographs are Images." Do you think there is a thematic trend of feelings of isolation among Japanese literature, or is it a global trend? And is there a tie to the Japanese societal phenomena of parasite singles and hikikomori?*

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Aoko Matsuda: I don't think it's particular to Japan. I feel that isolation is a huge theme in American literature too. Rather than being particular to Japan, I think the feeling of isolation is shared all over the world. But *hikikomori* and those types... but America also has *hikikomori* doesn't it?

AQ: *I guess it's not as famous of a phenomenon.*

Satoshi Kitamura: Don't you think that in a way—I kind of feel that the world is becoming Japonized in these things. An idea like *otaku*, which became English, the word, came because people behaved in a certain way. The Japanese started doing this ten years before the rest of the world. That's how I see it—in England, twenty years ago, there was a TV program showing stupid Japanese TV shows. At the beginning they thought, "How weird those are." Five years later, they start the same TV shows themselves, just like Japanese TV. So in a way, the Japanese, probably because of our society, somehow started—in a negative sense—and are sort of ahead of the rest of the world. In things like isolation, or some style of isolation, like *otaku* things.

